

# CHARLOTTE BRONTË

## EMMA

### CHAPTER I.

We all seek an ideal in life. A pleasant fancy began to visit me in a certain year, that perhaps the number of human beings is few who do not find their quest at some era of life for some space more or less brief. I had certainly not found mine in youth, though the strong belief I held of its existence sufficed through all of my brightest and freshest time to keep me hopeful. I had not found it in maturity. I was become resigned never to find it. I had lived certain dim years entirely tranquil and unexpectant. And now I was not sure but something was hovering round my hearth which pleased me wonderfully.

Look at it, reader. Come into my parlor and judge for yourself whether I do right to care for this thing. First, you may scan me, if you please. We shall go on better together after a satisfactory introduction and due apprehension of identity. My name is Mrs. Chalfont. I am a widow. My house is good, and my income such as need not check the impulse either of charity or a moderate hospitality. I am not young nor yet old. There is no silver yet in my hair, but its yellow lustre is gone. In my face wrinkles are yet to come, but I have almost forgotten the days when it wore any bloom. I married when I was very young. I lived for fifteen years a life which, whatever its trials, could not be called stagnant. Then for five years I was alone and, having no children, desolate. Lately Fortune, by a somewhat curious turn of her wheel, placed in my way an interest and a companion.

The neighbourhood where I live is pleasant enough, its scenery agreeable, and its society civilized, though not numerous. About a mile from my house there is a ladies' school, established but lately — not more than three years since. The conductress of this school were of my acquaintances; and though I cannot say that they occupied the very highest place in my opinion — for they had brought back from some months' residence abroad, for finishing purposes, a good deal that was fantastic, affected, and pretentious — yet I awarded them some portion of that respect which seems the fair due of all women who face life bravely, and try to make their own way by their own efforts.

About a year after the Misses Wilcox opened their school, when the number of their pupils was as yet exceedingly limited, and when, no doubt, they were looking out anxiously enough for augmentation, the entrance-gate to their little drive was one day thrown back to admit a carriage — “a very handsome, fashionable carriage,” Miss Mabel Wilcox said, in narrating the circumstance afterwards — and drawn by a pair of really splendid horses. The sweep up the drive, the loud ring at the doorbell, the bustling entrance into the house, the ceremonious admission to the bright drawing-room, roused excitement enough in Fuchsia Lodge. Miss Wilcox repaired to the reception-room in a pair of new gloves, and carrying in her hand a handkerchief of French cambric.

She found a gentleman seated on the sofa, who, as he rose up, appeared a tall, fine-looking personage; at least she thought him so, as he stood with his back to the light. He introduced himself as Mr. Fitzgibbon, inquired if Miss Wilcox had a vacancy, and intimated that he wished to intrust to her care a new pupil in the shape of his daughter. This was welcome news, for there was many a vacancy in Miss Wilcox's school room; indeed, her establishment was as yet limited to the select number of three, and she and her sisters were looking forward with anything but confidence to the balancing of accounts at the close of their first half-year. Few objects could have been more agreeable to her, then, than that to which, by a wave of the hand, Mr. Fitzgibbon now directed her attention — the figure of a child standing near the drawing-room window.

Had Miss Wilcox's establishment boasted fuller ranks — had she indeed entered well on that course of prosperity which in after years an undeviating attention to externals enabled her so triumphantly to realize — an early thought with her would have been to judge whether the acquisition now offered was likely to answer well as a show-pupil. She would have instantly marked her look, dress, &c., and inferred her value from these indicia. In those anxious commencing times, however, Miss Wilcox could scarce afford herself the luxury of such appreciation: a new pupil represented forty pounds a year, independently of master's terms — and forty pounds a year was a sum Miss Wilcox needed and was glad to secure; besides, the fine carriage, the fine gentleman, and the fine name, gave gratifying assurance, enough and to spare, of eligibility in the proffered connection. It was admitted, then, that there were vacancies in Fuchsia Lodge; that Miss Fitzgibbon could be received at once; that she was to learn all that the school prospectus proposed to teach; to be liable to every extra: in short, to be as expensive, and consequently as profitable a pupil as any directress's heart could wish. All this was arranged as upon velvet, smoothly and liberally. Mr. Fitzgibbon showed in the transaction none of the hardness of the bargain-making man of business, and as little of the penurious anxiety of the straitened professional man. Miss Wilcox felt him to be “quite the gentleman.” Everything disposed her to be partially inclined towards the little girl whom he, on taking leave, formally committed to her guardianship; and as if no circumstance should be wanting to complete her happy impression, the address left written on a card served to fill up the measure of Miss Wilcox's satisfaction — Conway Fitzgibbon, Esq., May Park, Midland County. That very day three decrees were passed in the newcomer's favor: —

1st. That she was to be Miss Wilcox's bed-fellow.

2d. To sit next her at table.

3d. To walk out with her.

In a few days it became evident that a fourth secret clause had been added to these, viz., that Miss Fitzgibbon was to be favored, petted and screened on all possible occasions.

An ill-conditioned pupil, who before coming to Fuchsia Lodge had passed a year under the care of certain old-fashioned Misses Sterling, of Hartwood, and from them had picked up unpractical notions of justice, took it upon her to utter an opinion on this system of favoritism.

“The Misses Sterling,” she injudiciously said, “never distinguished any girl because she was richer or better dressed than the rest. They would have scorned to do so. They always rewarded girls according as they behaved well to their school fellows and minded their lessons, not according to the number of their silk dresses, and fine laces, and feathers.”

For it must not be forgotten that Miss Fitzgibbon's trunks, when opened, disclosed a splendid wardrobe; so fine were the various articles of apparel, indeed, that instead of assigning for their accommodation the painted deal drawers of the school bedroom, Miss Wilcox had them arranged in a mahogany bureau in her own room. With her own hands, too, she would on Sundays array the little favorite in her quilted silk pelisse, her hat and feathers, her ermine boa, and little French boots and gloves. And very self-complacent she felt when she led the young heiress (a letter from Mr. Fitzgibbon, received since his first visit, had communicated the additional particulars that his daughter was his only child, and would be the inheritress of his estates, including May Park, Midland County) — when she led her, I say, into the church, and seated her stately by her side at the top of the gallery-pew. Unbiased observers might, indeed, have wondered what there was to be proud of, and puzzled their heads to detect the special merits of this little woman in silk — for, to speak truth, Miss Fitzgibbon was far from being the beauty of the school: there were two or three blooming faces amongst her companions lovelier than hers. Had she been a poor child, Miss Wilcox herself would not have liked her physiognomy at all: rather, indeed, would it have repelled than attracted her; and, moreover — though Miss Wilcox hardly confessed the circumstance to herself, but, on the contrary, strove hard not to be conscious of it — there were moments when she became sensible of a certain strange weariness in continuing her system of partiality. It hardly came natural to her to show this special distinction in this particular instance. An undefined wonder would smite her sometimes that she did not take more real satisfaction in flattering and caressing this embryo heiress — that she did not like better to have her always at her side, under her special charge. On principle Miss Wilcox continued the plan she had begun. On principle, for she argued with herself: This was the richest and most aristocratic of my pupils; she brings me the most credit and the most profit; therefore, I ought in justice to show her a special indulgence; which she did — but with a gradually increasing peculiarity of feeling.

Certainly, the undue favors showered on little Miss Fitzgibbon brought their object no real benefit. Unfitted for the character of playfellow by her position of favorite, her fellow pupils rejected her company as decidedly as they dared. Active rejection was not long necessary; it was soon seen that passive avoidance would suffice; the pet was not social. No. Even Miss Wilcox never thought her social. When she sent for her to show her fine clothes in the drawing-room when there was company, and especially when she had her into her parlor of an evening to be her own companion, Miss Wilcox used to feel curiously perplexed. She would try to talk affably to the young heiress, to draw her out, to amuse her. To herself the governess could render no reason why her efforts soon flagged; but this was invariably the case. However, Miss Wilcox was a woman of courage; and be the protégé what she might, the patroness did not fail to continue on principle her system of preference.

A favorite has no friends; and the observation of a gentleman, who about this time called at the Lodge and chanced to see Miss Fitzgibbon, was, "That child looks consummately unhappy:" he was watching Miss Fitzgibbon, as she walked, by herself, fine and solitary, while her schoolfellows were merrily playing.

"Who is the miserable little wight?" he asked.

He was told her name and dignity.

"Wretched little soul!" he repeated; and he watched her pace down the walk and back again; marching upright, her hands in her ermine muff, her fine pelisse showing a gay sheen to the winter's sun, her large Leghorn hat shading such a face as fortunately had not its parallel on the premises.

"Wretched little soul!" reiterated this gentleman. He opened the drawing-room window, watched the bearer of the muff till he caught her eye, and then summoned her with his finger. She came; he stooped his head down to her; she lifted her face up to him.

"Don't you play, little girl?"

"No, sir."

"No! Why not? Do you think yourself better than other children?"

No answer.

"Is it because people tell you you are rich, you won't play?"

The young lady was gone. He stretched his hand to arrest her, but she wheeled beyond his reach, and ran quickly out of sight.

"An only child," pleaded Miss Wilcox; "possibly spoiled by her papa, you know; we must excuse a little pettishness."

"Humph! I am afraid there is not a little to excuse."

## CHAPTER II.

Mr. Ellin — the gentleman mentioned in the last chapter — was a man who went where he liked, and being a gossiping, leisurely person, he liked to go almost anywhere. He could not be rich, he lived so quietly; and yet he must have had some money, for, without apparent profession, he continued to keep a house and a servant. He always spoke of himself as having once been a worker; but if so, that could not have been very long since, for he still looked far from old. Sometimes of an evening, under a little social conversational excitement, he would look quite young; but he was changeable in mood, and complexion, and expression, and had chameleon eyes, sometimes blue and merry, sometimes gray and dark, and anon green and gleaming. On the whole he might be called a fair man, of average height, rather thin and rather wiry. He had not resided more than two years in the present neighbourhood; his antecedents were unknown there; but as the Rector, a man of good family and standing, and of undoubted scrupulousness in the choice of acquaintance, had introduced him, he found everywhere a prompt reception, of which nothing in his conduct had yet seemed to prove him unworthy. Some people, indeed, dubbed him “a character,” and fancied him “eccentric;” but others could not see the appropriateness of the epithets. He always seemed to them very harmless and quiet, not always perhaps so perfectly unreserved and comprehensible as might be wished. He had a discomposing expression in his eye; and sometimes in conversation an ambiguous diction; but still they believed he meant no harm.

Mr. Ellin often called on the Misses Wilcox; he sometimes took tea with them; he appeared to like tea and muffins, and not to dislike the kind of conversation which usually accompanies that refreshment; he was said to be a good shot, a good angler. He proved himself an excellent gossip — he liked gossip well. On the whole he liked women’s society, and did not seem to be particular in requiring difficult accomplishments or rare endowments in his female acquaintance. The Misses Wilcox, for instance, were not much less shallow than the china saucer which held their teacups; yet Mr. Ellin got on perfectly well with them, and had apparently great pleasure in hearing them discuss all the details of their school. He knew the names of all their young ladies too; he knew their examination days and gala days, and more than once accompanied Mr. Cecil, the curate, when he went to examine in ecclesiastical history.

This ceremony took place weekly, on Wednesday afternoons, after which Mr. Cecil sometimes stayed to tea, and usually found two or three lady parishioners invited to meet him. Mr. Ellin was also pretty sure to be there. Rumor gave one of the Misses Wilcox in anticipated wedlock to the curate, and furnished his friend with a second in the same tender relation; so that it is to be conjectured they made a social, pleasant party under such interesting circumstances. Their evenings rarely passed without Miss Fitzgibbon being introduced — all worked muslin and streaming sash and elaborate ringlets; others of the pupils would also be called in, perhaps to sing, to show off a little at the piano, or sometimes to repeat poetry. Miss Wilcox conscientiously cultivated display in her young ladies, thinking she thus fulfilled a duty to herself and to them, at once spreading her own fame and giving the children self-possessed manners.

It was curious to note how, on these occasions, good, genuine natural qualities still vindicated their superiority to counterfeit, artificial advantages. While “dear Miss Fitzgibbon,” dressed up and flattered as she was, could only sidle round the circle with the crestfallen air which seemed natural to her, just giving her hand to the guests, then almost snatching it away, and sneaking in unmannerly haste to the place allotted to her at Miss Wilcox’s side, which place she filled like a piece of furniture, neither smiling nor speaking the evening through — while such as her deportment, certain of her companions, as Mary Franks, Jessy Newton, &c., handsome, open-countenanced little damsels — fearless because harmless — would enter with a smile of salutation and a blush of pleasure, make their pretty reverence at the drawing-room door, stretch a friendly little hand to such visitors as they knew, and sit down to the piano to play their well-practiced duet with an innocent, obliging readiness which won all hearts.

There was a girl called Diana — the girl alluded to before as having once been Miss Sterling’s pupil — a daring, brave girl, much loved and a little feared by her comrades. She had good faculties, both physical and mental — was clever, honest, and dauntless. In the schoolroom she set her young brow like a rock against Miss Fitzgibbon’s pretensions; she found also heart and spirit to withstand them in the drawing-room. One evening, when the curate had been summoned away by some piece of duty directly after tea, and there was no stranger present but Mr. Ellin, Diana had been called in to play a long, difficult piece of music, which she could execute like a master. She was still in the midst of her performance, when — Mr. Ellin having for the first time, perhaps, recognized the existence of the heiress by asking if she was cold — Miss Wilcox took the opportunity of launching into a strain of commendation on Miss Fitzgibbon’s inanimate behaviour, terming it lady-like, modest, and exemplary. Whether Miss Wilcox’s constrained tone betrayed how far she was from really feeling the approbation she expressed, how entirely she spoke from a sense of duty, and not because she felt it possible to be in any degree charmed by the personage she praised — or whether Diana, who was by nature hasty, had a sudden fit of irritability — is not quite certain, but she turned on her music-stool.

“Ma’am,” said she to Miss Wilcox, “that girl does not deserve so much praise. Her behaviour is not at all exemplary. In the schoolroom she is insolently distant. For my part I denounce her airs; there is not one of us but is as good or better than she, though we may not be as rich.”

And Diana shut up the piano, took her music-book under her arm, curtsied, and vanished.

Strange to relate, Miss Wilcox said not a word at the time; nor was Diana subsequently reprimanded for this outbreak. Miss Fitzgibbon had now been three months in the school, and probably the governess had had leisure to wear out her early raptures of partiality.

Indeed, as time advanced, this evil often seemed likely to right itself; again and again it seemed that Miss Fitzgibbon was about to fall to her proper level, but then, somewhat provokingly to the lovers of reason and justice, some little incident would occur to invest

her insignificance with artificial interest. Once it was the arrival of a great basket of hothouse fruit — melons, grapes, and pines — as a present to Miss Wilcox in Miss Fitzgibbon's name. Whether it was that a share of these luscious productions was imparted too freely to the nominal donor, or whether she had had a surfeit of cake on Miss Mabel Wilcox's birthday, it so befell, that in some disturbed state of the digestive organs Miss Fitzgibbon took to sleepwalking. She one night terrified the school into a panic by passing through the bedrooms, all white in her night-dress, moaning and holding out her hands as she went.

Dr. Percy was then sent for; his medicines, probably, did not suit the case; for within a fortnight after the somnambulistic feat, Miss Wilcox going up stairs in the dark, trod on something which she thought was the cat, and on calling for a light, found her darling Matilda Fitzgibbon curled round on the landing, blue, cold, and stiff, without any light in her half-open eyes, or any color in her lips or movement in her limbs. She was not soon roused from this fit; her senses seemed half scattered; and Miss Wilcox had now an undeniable excuse for keeping her all day on the drawing-room sofa, and making more of her than ever.

There comes a day of reckoning both for petted heiresses and partial governesses.

One clear winter morning, as Mr. Ellin was seated at breakfast, enjoying his bachelor's easy-chair and damp, fresh London newspaper, a note was brought to him marked "private," and "in haste." The last injunction was vain, for William Ellin if nothing in haste — he had no haste in him; he wondered anybody should be so foolish as to hurry; life was short enough without it. He looked at the little note — three-cornered, scented, feminine. He knew the handwriting; it came from the very lady Rumor had so often assigned him as his own. The bachelor took out a morocco case, selected from a variety of little instruments a pair of scissors, cut round the seal, and read: — "Miss Wilcox's compliments to Mr. Ellin, and she should be truly glad to see him for a few minutes, if at leisure. Miss W. requires a little advice. She will reserve explanations till she sees Mr. E."

Mr. Ellin very quietly finished his breakfast; then, as it was a very fine December day — hoar and crisp, but serene, and not bitter — he carefully prepared himself for the cold, took his cane, and set out. He liked the walk; the air was still; the sun not wholly ineffectual; the path firm, and but lightly powdered with snow. He made his journey as long as he could by going round through many fields, and through winding, unfrequented lanes. When there was a tree in the way conveniently placed for support, he would sometimes stop, lean his back against the trunk, fold his arms, and muse. If Rumor could have seen him, she would have affirmed that he was thinking about Miss Wilcox; perhaps when he arrives at the Lodge his demeanor will inform us whether such an idea be warranted.

At last he stands at the door and rings the bell; he is admitted, and shown into the parlor — a smaller and more private room than the drawing-room. Miss Wilcox occupies it; she is seated at her writing-table; she rises — not without air and grace — to receive her visitor. This air and grace she learned in France; for she was in a Parisian school for six months, and learned there a little French, and a stock of gestures and courtesies. No: it is certainly not impossible that Mr. Ellin may admire Miss Wilcox. She is not without prettiness, any more than are her sisters; and she and they are one and all smart and showy. Bright stone-blue is a color they like in dress; a crimson bow rarely fails to be pinned on somewhere to give contrast; positive colors generally — grass-greens, red violets, deep yellows — are in favor with them; all harmonies are at a discount. Many people would think Miss Wilcox, standing there in her blue merino dress and pomegranate ribbon, a very agreeable woman. She has regular features; the nose is a little sharp, the lips a little thin, good complexion, light red hair. She is very business-like, very practical; she never in her life knew a refinement of feeling or of thought; she is entirely limited, respectable, and self-satisfied. She has a cool, prominent eye; sharp and shallow pupil, unshrinking and inexpressive; pale irid; light eyelashes, light brow. Miss Wilcox is a very proper and decorous person; but she could not be delicate or modest, because she is naturally destitute of sensitiveness. Her voice, when she speaks, has no vibration; her face no expression; her manner no emotion. Blush or tremor she never knew.

"What can I do for you, Miss Wilcox?" says Mr. Ellin, approaching the writing-table, and taking a chair beside it.

"Perhaps you can advise me," was the answer; "or perhaps you can give me some information. I feel so thoroughly puzzled, and really fear all is not right."

"Where? and how?"

"I will have redress if it be possible," pursued the lady; "but how to set about obtaining it! Draw to the fire, Mr. Ellin; it is a cold day."

They both drew near to the fire. She continued, "You know the Christmas holidays are near?"

He nodded.

"Well, about a fortnight since, I wrote, as is customary, to the friends of my pupils, notifying the day when we break up and requesting that, if it was desired that any girl should stay the vacation, intimation should be sent accordingly. Satisfactory and prompt answers came to all the notes except one — that addressed to Conway Fitzgibbon, Esquire, May Park, Midland County — Matilda Fitzgibbon's father, you know."

"What? won't he let her go home?"

"Let her go home, my dear sir! you shall hear. two weeks elapsed, during which I daily expected an answer; none came. I felt annoyed at the delay, as I had particularly requested a speedy reply. This very morning I had made up my mind to write again, when — what do you think the post brought me?"

"I should like to know."

"My own letter — actually my own — returned from the post-office with an intimation — such an intimation! — but read her yourself."

She handed to Mr. Ellin an envelope; he took from it the returned note and a paper — the paper bore a hastily-scribbled line or two. It said, in brief terms, that there was no such place in Midland County as May Park, and that no such person had ever been heard of there as Conway Fitzgibbon, Esquire.

On reading this, Mr. Ellin slightly opened his eyes.

"I hardly thought it was so bad as this," said he.

"What? you did think it was bad, then? You suspected that something was wrong?"

"Really! I scarcely know what I thought or suspected. How very odd, no such place as May Park! The grand mansion, the grounds,

the oaks, the deer, vanished clean away. And then Fitzgibbon himself! But you saw Fitzgibbon — he came in his carriage?”

“In his carriage!” echoed Miss Wilcox; “a most stylish equipage, and himself a most distinguished person. Do you think, after all, there is some mistake?”

“Certainly, a mistake; but when it is rectified I don’t think Fitzgibbon or May Park will be forthcoming. Shall I run down to Midland County and look after these two precious objects?”

“Oh! would you be so good, Mr. Ellin? I knew you would be so kind; personal inquiry, you know — there’s nothing like it.”

“Nothing at all. Meantime, what shall you do with the child — the pseudo-heiress, if pseudo she be? Shall you correct her — let her know her place?”

“I think,” responded Miss Wilcox reflectively — “I think not exactly as yet; my plan is to do nothing in a hurry; we will inquire first. If after all she should turn out to be connected as was at first supposed, one had better not do anything which one might afterwards regret. No; I shall make no difference with her till I hear from you again.”

“Very good. As you please,” said Mr. Ellin, with that coolness which made him so convenient a counsellor in Miss Wilcox’s opinion. In his dry laconism she found the response suited to her outer worldliness. She thought he said enough if he did not oppose her. The comment he stinted so avariciously she did not want.

Mr. Ellin “ran down,” as he said, to Midland County. It was an errand that seemed to suit him; for he had curious predilections as well as peculiar methods of his own. Any secret quest was to his taste; perhaps there was something of the amateur detective in him. He could conduct an inquiry and draw no attention. His quiet face never looked inquisitive, nor did his sleepless eye betray vigilance.

He was away about a week. The day after his return he appeared in Miss Wilcox’s presence as cool as if he had seen her but yesterday. Confronting her with that fathomless face he liked to show her, he first told her he had done nothing.

Let Mr. Ellin be as enigmatical as he would, he never puzzled Miss Wilcox. She never saw enigma in the man. Some people feared, because they did not understand him; to her it had not yet occurred to begin to spell his nature or analyze his character. If she had an impression about him, it was, that he was an idle but obliging man, not aggressive, of few words, but often convenient. Whether he were clever and deep, or deficient and shallow, close or open, odd or ordinary, she saw no practical end to be answered by inquiry, and therefore did not inquire.

“Why had he done nothing?” she now asked.

“Chiefly because there is nothing to do.”

“Then he could give her no information?”

“Not much; only this, indeed — Conway Fitzgibbon was a man of straw; May Park a house of cards. there was no vestige of such man or mansion in Midland County, or in any other shire in England. Tradition herself had nothing to say about either name or the place. The oracle of old deeds and registers, when consulted, had not responded.”

“Who can he be, then, that came here, and who is this child?”

“That’s just what I can’t tell you; — an incapacity which makes me say I have done nothing.”

“And how am I to get paid?”

“Can’t tell you that either.”

“A quarter’s board and education owing, and master’s terms besides,” pursued Miss Wilcox. “How infamous! I can’t afford the loss.”

“And if we were only in the good old times,” said Mr. Ellin, “where we ought to be, you might just send Miss Matilda out to the plantations in Virginia, sell her for what she is worth, and pay yourself.”

“Matilda, indeed, and Fitzgibbon! A little impostor. I wonder what her real name is?”

“Betty Hodge? Poll Smith? Hannah Jones?” suggested Mr. Ellin.

“Now,” cried Miss Wilcox, “give me credit for sagacity. It’s very odd, but try as I would, — and I made every effort, — I never could really like that child. She has had every indulgence in this house; and I am sure I made great sacrifice of feeling to principle in showing her much attention, for I could not make any one believe the degree of antipathy I have all along felt towards her.”

“Yes. I can believe it. I saw it.”

“Did you? Well, it proves that my discernment is rarely at fault. Her game is now up, however; and time it was. I have said nothing to her yet; but now — “

“Have her in whilst I am here,” said Mr. Ellin. “Has she known of this business? Is she in the secret? Is she herself an accomplice, or a mere tool? Have her in.”

Miss Wilcox rang the bell, demanded Matilda Fitzgibbon, and the false heiress soon appeared. She came in her ringlets, her sash, and her furbelowed dress adornments, alas! no longer acceptable.

“Stand there!” said Miss Wilcox sternly, checking her as she approached the hearth. “Stand there on the further side of the table. I have a few questions to put to you, and your business will be to answer them. And mind, let us have the truth. We will not endure lies.”

Ever since Miss Fitzgibbon had been found in the fit, her face had retained a peculiar paleness and her eyes a dark orbit. When thus addressed, she began to shake and blanch like conscious guilt personified.

“Who are you?” demanded Miss Wilcox. “What do you know about yourself?”

A sort of half-interjection escaped the girl’s lips; it was a sound expressing partly fear, and partly the shock which the nerves feel when an evil, very long expected, at last and suddenly arrives.

“Keep yourself still, and reply, if you please,” said Miss Wilcox, whom nobody should blame for lacking pity, because nature had not made her compassionate. “What is your name? We know you have no right to that of Matilda Fitzgibbon.”

She gave no answer.

“I do insist upon a reply. Speak you shall, sooner or later. So you had better do it at once.

This inquisition had evidently a very strong effect upon the subject of it. She stood as if palsied, trying to speak, but apparently not competent to articulate.

Miss Wilcox did not fly into a passion, but she grew very stern and urgent, spoke a little loud, and there was a dry clamor in her

raised voice which seemed to beat upon the ear and bewilder the brain. Her interest had been injured — her pocket wounded. She was vindicating her rights, and she had no eye to see, and no nerve to feel, but for the point in hand. Mr. Ellin appeared to consider himself strictly a looker-on; he stood on the hearth very quiet.

At last the culprit spoke. A low voice escaped her lips. "Oh, my head!" she cried, lifting her hands to her forehead. She staggered, but caught the door and did not fall. Some accusers might have been startled by such a cry — even silenced; not so Miss Wilcox. She was neither cruel nor violent; but she was coarse because insensible. Having just drawn breath, she went on, harsh as ever.

Mr. Ellin, leaving the hearth, deliberately paced up the room, as if he were tired of standing still, and would walk a little for a change. In returning and passing near the door and the criminal, a faint breath seemed to seek his ear, whispering his name, —

"Oh, Mr. Ellin!"

The child dropped as she spoke. A curious voice — not like Mr. Ellin's though it came from his lips — asked Miss Wilcox to cease speaking, and say no more. He gathered from the floor what had fallen on it. She seemed overcome, but not unconscious. Resting beside Mr. Ellin, in a few minutes she again drew breath. She raised her eyes to him.

"Come, my little one; have no fear," said he.

Reposing her head against him, she gradually became assured. It did not cost him another word to bring her round; even strong trembling was calmed by the mere effects of his protection. He told Miss Wilcox with remarkable tranquillity, but still with a certain decision, that the little girl must be put to bed. He carried her up stairs, and saw her laid there himself. Returning to Miss Wilcox, he said, "Say no more to her. Beware, or you will do more mischief than you think or wish. That kind of nature is very different from yours. It is not possible that you should like it; but let it alone. We will talk more on the subject to-morrow. Let me question her."